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ABSTRACT

A structured social skills program was developed for young African American males (N=33), in grades one and two in an urban setting. The study was designed to employ social skills to improve reading and mathematics skills. The students selected had demonstrated previous social skill deficits as determined by a pre-assessment instrument. These deficits included poor attendance, poor interpersonal skills, stress, poor organization and study skills, and destructive and aggressive behaviors. The structured social skills program was conducted over a one year period. Activities included techniques for: improving bonding; attention; belonging; recognition of the students' roles and positions in a group; developing confidence and motivation; caring; problem solving; and other social behaviors. Evidence of change was recorded on a student assessment profile. Results were also computed for reading and mathematics grades. Findings indicated that the students showed significant improvement in interpersonal skills and reading and mathematics achievement. Follow-up with students' parents and teachers also indicated that the program was successful. The program could be improved if school resources are integrated towards changes in behavior, families are more involved, and a longer period of study and follow-up is used. (Contains 22 references.) (JLS)

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions Toward the Affects of Social Skills Training on Reading and Mathematical Achievement of Young African American Males.

*George Taylor and Lois Nixon

A structured social skills program was developed for young African American Males in a large urban setting. The study was designed to employ social skills to improve reading and mathematic skills. Thirty three (33) boys were selected to participate in the study. The boys selected had demonstrated previous social skills deficits as determined by a pre-assessment instrument.

The structured social skills program was conducted over a one year period. Findings indicated that the boys showed significant improvement in interpersonal skills and reading and mathematic achievement. All measures were significant at the .01 level or greater specific recommendations were made for strengthening the program.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers and Parents Perceptions Toward the Affects of Social Skill Training on Reading and Mathematical Achievement of Young African-American Males

*George Taylor and Lois Nixon

A significant percentage of Black children live in urban communities. The culture and life styles of these communities frequently impede normal growth and development in several key areas of functioning (Matsueda, 1987, Butler, 1989; Tomlinson, 1988).

Social development is a major area in which many young African American males need assistance. They frequently have developed inappropriate interpersonal skills which are not accepted by the school. Inability to conform to expected social standards may result in unacceptable social behavior in school towards peer and adults. Appropriate social skills are essential for developing personal relationships and accepting the role of authority figures (Taylor, 1992). Research findings, by Bradly (1989) Hillard (1989) Butler (1989) Holland (1987) and Johnson (1990), support the notion that unacceptable social behaviors are directly associated with deprived cultural environments. Children model and imitate behaviors from their environments. Innovative ways must be found by the schools to provide appropriate role models for young African American males to imitate and copy. In some instances social skills will be needed to be taught and infused into the curriculum.

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According to Katz (1991) social behaviors are learned, therefore, they can be changed and modified with appropriate intervention. They require that an individual evaluate a situation, choose the appropriate social skills, and perform the social tasks appropriately. Unfortunately, many young African-American males have not been exposed to appropriate social models or do not possess enough prerequisite skills, such as maturity and self control, to successfully perform the social skills. Development of social skills in African-American males as well as all children, require that they have appropriate models to copy and imitate, to recognize non-verbal clues and to adjust their behaviors accordingly. Many young African-American males have not mastered the above techniques. According to Holland (1987) and Ayers (1989) early intervention is needed to expose young Black males to appropriate social models.

Mastsueda (1987) and Gibbs (1988) research support the findings of Katz (1991); they indicated that negative behaviors are learned behaviors which children imitate from their environments. The school view these behaviors as hostile and destructive and respond to children in a negative fashion, thus creating conflict and tension between school and children.

Findings from other studies support the aforementioned research by concluding that many African-American males may have developed or adapted alternative ways and styles of coping with problems in their communities. These behavioral styles are frequently in conflict with the school and society in general, and may be viewed as negative or destructive. Behavioral styles and

models copied and imitated by your African-American males may serve them well in their environments, but are frequently viewed as dysfunctional by the school (Harris, 1992; Taylor, 1992; Hillard, 1989).

A perusal of other research, relevant to teaching social skills to young African American males appears to be in agreement regarding the importance of teaching social skills to African-American males. The preponderance of research strongly support the concept of teaching and integrating social skills into the curriculum as well as emphasizing the fact that social skills should assume a position of primacy along with the basic three R's (Hillard, 1989; Deal, 1990; Bikien, 1989; Hatch, 1992; Forest, 1990; Collins, 1992; Kagan, 1989; Johnson, 1990). This study was one attempt to develop strategies for promoting social skills among young Black males.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was designed to determine if a structured program in social skills would improve reading, mathematic and interpersonal achievement of young African-American males.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The major purpose of the study was to determine if a structured program in social skills development could improve reading, mathematic and interpersonal achievement of young African-American males.

MAJOR HYPOTHESES

There will be a significant difference in reading, mathematic and interpersonal skills of young African-American males after they

have participated in a year long structured program in social skills development.

MINOR HYPOTHESES

1. There will be a significant difference in reading and math achievement of young African-American males after they have participated in a structured social skills program.
2. There will be significant difference in how parents and teachers perceive social skills development of young African-American males after they have participated in the structure social skills program.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Sample

Boys selected to participate in this study were in grades 1 and 2. The boys were administered a pre-assessment inventory, before the intervention program was initiated, by teachers participating in the study. The inventory was not administered to determine who would be selected or rejected to participate in the study, rather it was administered to determine the types of social skills development were needed by the boys.

Instrumentation

As outlined a pre-assessment inventory was constructed and administered to African-American males participating in the study. Results from the survey indicated a variety of social skills deficits such as poor attendance, poor interpersonal skills, stress, poor organization and study skills, destructive and aggressive behaviors. These social skills deficits formed the bases for developing the structured social skills program for

grouping the boys into various groups for remediating or eliminating the social skills deficit.

A student assessment profile was constructed to record reading and mathematics grades and social development of the boys by teachers involved in the program on a pre-post test basis.

A social skills checklist was developed and administered to the boys on a pre-post test basis by teachers and parents. There were forty items in the checklist with a four point scale ranging from always (a lot, sometimes) to never. Total scores were computed for the instrument for each subject.

Intervention

African-American males who participated in this study were exposed to a year of structured social skills training. Activities included techniques for improving bonding, attention, belonging, recognition of their roles and positions in a group, developing confidence, motivation, caring, problem solving techniques, and other behavioral problems. The aforementioned activities constituted the behavioral skills developed for the intervention.

For each skill a set of steps were developed. The steps were presented following a set sequence: (1) The teacher modeled the behavior; (2) The student attempted to repeat the demonstrated behavior; (3) Other students critiqued the behavior, and (4) The student practiced the skill independent of the group. These steps assisted young Black males in internalizing their behaviors and assessing how their behaviors impact upon others.

The structured social skills learning program followed the listed format for each behavior taught:

1. Behaviors were written in behavioral terms.
2. The application of task analysis was followed until each skill was mastered before moving to the next skill.
3. Some classroom arrangements were necessary to accomplish some of the skills.
4. No specific time of the day was devoted to skill training, rather the training was infused into the regular curriculum whenever possible.
5. A reinforcement system was developed before the intervention was initiated.
6. Specific rules were developed for each skill with as much input from the boys as possible, and written in observable and measurable terms.
7. Rules were understood by the boys, that is, they were able to complete the task.

New social skills were developed only when students had successfully transferred a prior skill.

Analysis of Data

Data were recorded on a student assessment profile. Sum totals for each of the measures in reading, math, attendance office referrals and social skills development were used in analyzing the data. Several types of analyses were conducted including, descriptive statistics and "t" tests. The "t" test results computed for reading and mathematical grades as well as to determine significant levels on other measures. Significant levels were set at the .05 level of confidence for all measures.

Results

Table I outlines the numbers and percentages of pre-post reading and mathematics grades of African-American males participating the study.

Table I

Frequency Analyses of Pre-Post Reading and Mathematics Achievement
(N=33)

	Reading				Mathematics			
	Pre Reading		Post Reading		Pre Math		Post Math	
Grade	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Good	8	24	13	39	1	3	10	30
Satisfactory	14	42	18	54	12	36	14	36
Unsatisfactory	5	15	1	3.5	5	15	6	18
Fail	6	19	1	3.5	12	46	3	9
Total	33	100	33	100	33	100	33	100

Table I reveals that achievement in reading and mathematic significantly improved between the two testing periods. There was a significant increase in "Good" grades for both reading and mathematics. The satisfactory categories in both measures showed the greatest gains. The unsatisfactory category showed a slight decrease for each measure; similarly, a decrease was noted in the number of failing grades received between the two testing periods.

Chi-square results are reported in Table II for reading and mathematic achievement.

Table II

Chi-Square Values Pre\Post Achievement
Reading and Mathematic N=33

	x2	P
Reading	19.8	>.001
Math	12.8	>.001

Both reading and mathematic achievement showed a significant difference between the pre and post testing periods. Both measures were significant beyond the .001 level. These results imply that the intervention had a positive affect of reading and mathematic achievement of young African American males.

Table III show the means, standard deviations and "t" test results for reading and mathematic achievement.

Table III

Means, Standard Deviations and T-Test Analyses for Reading and Mathematic Achievement

Measures	Pre-Analysis		Post Analysis		t. value	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Reading	3.85	1.004	4.49	1.176	5.60	>.001
Math	2.758	1.323	4.121	1.193	7.22	>.001

Inspection of Table II and III clearly shows that significant differences occurred between the two periods in reading and mathematic achievement. Significant level surpassed the .001 level of confidence. Data suggest that the structured social skills program had a significant impact on the reading and mathematic achievement of the young African-American males. Thus, the hypothesis which stated that there will be a significant difference in reading and mathematics achievement of African-American males after they had participated in a structured social skills program was supported beyond the .001 level of confidence.

Pre-post perception of social skill development of boys participating in the study as viewed by parents and teachers are reflected in Tables IV and V.

Table IV

Teachers Perception of Social Skills Development (N=28)

Pre Social Skills		Post Social Skills		Difference	Percent Growth
Score	#	Score	#		
-48	1	13	1	-35	42%
-59	1	13	1	-46	44%
-65	1	14	1	-51	44%
-67	1	15	1	-52	44%
-68	1	17	1	-51	44%
-75	1	18	1	-57	43%
-76	2	18	1	-58	43%
-77	1	20	1	-57	43%
-78	3	21	1	-57	42%
-79	2	21	1	-58	42%
-81	1	21	1	-60	43%
-83	1	23	1	-60	43%
-85	1	24	1	-61	42%
-88	1	24	1	-64	42%
-91	3	25	4	-66	42%
-92	1	28	1	-64	41%
-93	1	28	1	-65	41%
-95	2	28	1	-67	41%
-97	1	29	2	-68	41%
-100	1	30	1	-70	41%
-106	1	31	4	-75	41%
TOTAL	28		28		

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Table V

Parents Perception of Social Skills Development (N=21)

Pre Social Skills		Post Social Skills		Difference	Percent Growth
Score	#	Score	#		
-67	1	31	2	-36	35%
-74	1	29	1	-45	38%
-79	2	28	3	-51	39%
-82	1	27	1	-55	40%
-84	1	26	3	-58	41%
-85	2	25	3	-60	41%
-88	3	23	1	-65	42%
-89	1	24	1	-65	42%
-90	1	22	1	-68	43%
-91	1	21	2	-70	43%
-92	2	20	2	-72	44%
-95	5	18	1	-77	45%
Total	21		21		

Data in Tables IV and V strongly suggest that significant differences existed in social skills development as reported by teachers and parents. Significant percent differences were reported by both teachers and parents in social skill development. Teachers tended to rate social behavior growth higher. Results supported the hypothesis which sated that parents and teachers would perceive social skills development of African-American males as positive after they have participated in a structured social skills.

Significant differences reported in Tables II and III strongly supported the major hypothesis of this study. It was hypothesized that there will be a significant difference in reading and mathematic achievements of African-American males after they have participated in a year long structured program in social skills development. All measures in the aforementioned were significant beyond the 01.level of confidence.

Discussion

Generally, most of the African-American males in this study were pleased with their progress and voiced a concern to continue with the program. Both teachers and parents were pleased with the significant social and academic gains that students had made in improving their academic and interpersonal skills.

The study, based on the findings of this investigation implied that there is a vital need to intervene and teach social skills to African-American males at an early age. Data from this study tended to support the premise that deficits in social skills development can be compensated for African-American males if early

systematic planning is conducted between the home and school.

In analyzing the statistical data in this study as to the project's effectiveness there is a need to proceed cautiously. Deficiencies in the research design involved a failure to determine actual achievement in reading and mathematics, attitudes toward school, length of time of the project in the school, and involvement of the school in other experimental programs may have add an impacted on the positive results. Nevertheless, the project appeared to significantly change the negative and aggressive behaviors of the boys, expanded self-images and increased achievement in reading and mathematics. Improvement is needed if the program is to be strengthened, thus the following recommendations are made:

1. The total resources of the school should be used and integrated in order to bring about desired changes in behavior;

2. Additional studies of this nature should be attempted in other schools to see if results of this study can be replicated;

3. Parents must become an integral part of all planning designed to improve social skills of time their children;

4. Studies should be designed to follow up on the progress of the project boys over a span of three (3) to four (4) years to determine the long term effect of the structure social skills program on behavior.

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